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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000037

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SAYYID AL SHUHADA ON BASRAH OPERATIONS, IRANIAN INFLUENCE,
AND ELECTIONS

REF: A. BASRAH 28
[1](#)B. BASRAH 35
[1](#)C. MNF-I SAS BRIEF 06 FEB 08
[1](#)D. BASRAH 09

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CLASSIFIED BY: Howell H. Howard, Director, U.S. Regional Embassy
Office, Basrah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

(S/NF) SUMMARY: Regional Embassy Officers met with Sayyid al-Shuhada (SAS - aka Lord of the Martyrs) members April 22. SAS leader Sayid Dagher al-Musawi told us that the GOI was likely to continue its tribal initiative in Basrah, owing the tribes a debt for helping during Operation Charge of the Knights. SAS welcomed the U.S. military's assistance also, but opposed a larger force that the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) might call an "occupation." Dagher admitted that Iran, despite possibly pressuring JAM into a ceasefire, supplied JAM with lethal aid to fight the U.S. in Iraq. Looking ahead, the next elections would show that the GOI's crackdown on JAM would pay dividends for the ISCI-allied parties. SAS also demanded an explanation for the Coalition's detention of their newspaper editor. END SUMMARY.

SAS ON GOI TRIBAL INITIATIVE

(S/NF) SAS Secretary General and Council of Representatives (CoR) member Sayid Dagher al-Musawi; Political Director and Provincial Council member Qasim al-Fayad; and Dr. Nasser Abd al-Sajad visited us on April 21. Heading the CoR's Tribal Affairs Committee, Dagher confirmed that both the Political and Tribal Committees established by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to oversee a GOI tribal initiative have been disbanded (Ref A). Dagher excused their demise as "preparatory" for the formation of thirteen Tribal Support Committees (TSC) in Basrah's most populous districts with 10-12 tribes represented on each TSC (Ref B). TSC's would continue to report to Minister of Justice Safa al-Safi and the tribal advisors of the Implementation Follow-UP National Committee for Reconciliation.

(S/NF) Dagher also told us that only six tribal battalions would be formed for Gurnah, Zubayr, Shatt al-Arab, Albu al-Khaseeb, al-Madaynah, and al-Haritha. However, only the Shatt al-Arab battalion was formed. Dagher insisted that the sheikhs have not yet submitted names for the other battalions, but other contacts

have told us otherwise. Dagher hinted that the TSCs were not fully representative of all the tribes, blaming the limited number of seats on a TSC. Dagher opined that the GOI, owing a debt to the tribes for saving Basrah when the police failed, would continue to support a tribal scheme and that empowering the tribes did not frighten the political parties because the tribes had no political ambitions. When we pointed out the tribes' political influence in Anbar after the "Awakening", Dagher retorted that Anbar was dominated by only one tribe (al-Dulaymi), whereas no single tribe in Basrah could rise above the competition with the others.

(S/NF)Comment: Dagher's ties to Iran combined with his support for the continuation of this initiative raises questions about the possibility of Iranian interference (Ref C). Reporting indicates that Iran began initiating a dialogue with Iraq's tribes to possibly pre-empt a Coalition-led tribal strategy in southern Iraq after witnessing success of the Anbar Awakening. End Comment.

WE WANT YOUR MONEY, BUT KEEP THE TROOPS HOME

(S/NF) Dagher admitted that U.S. air support and humanitarian aid were helpful during Operation Charge of the Knights (CoK), adding that a limited U.S. military presence would be welcomed in the future. However, a large U.S. force would give JAM a pretext to fight the "occupation" and it was important that operations here maintain an Iraqi face to them. He also encouraged the U.S. to play a role in "significant infrastructure" projects.

IRAN'S ROLE

(S/NF) We noted that Iran might have played a positive role in pressuring Moqtada al-Sadr to order a ceasefire in early April, but Dagher avoided praising Iran directly. Instead, he said that SAS welcomed help regardless of the source, rejected foreign interference in Iraq, and claimed that the press

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exaggerates Iranian influence. Later, he admitted that Iran, despite helping to broker a ceasefire, supplied JAM with lethal aid using it as a proxy against America. SAS, he said, rejected using Iraq as an arena for the U.S. and Iran to fight, and he hoped that Baghdad could influence all parties at the next tripartite meeting to stop. We reminded SAS that it was not the U.S., but the Iranians who were sending lethal aid across the border.

BALANCE OF POWER

(S/NF) Dagher smugly told us that the results of the next election would confirm how the balance of political power had shifted in Basrah resulting from the GOI's crackdown on JAM. Sadrist rivals, he said, would not perform well in the elections, while the "House of Five" (ISCI/Badr/Thar Allah/SAS/Sayid al-Mihrab) had demonstrated that they "stood beside the GOI to enforce the rule of law and provide services resulting in the people's trust." He opined that the only way the Sadrists stood a chance was to cooperate with Fadhila in an alliance. Surprisingly, given the ideological ties between Fadhila and the Sadrists, he stressed that any cooperation was purely tactical and not strategic. Dagher also agreed that the GOI had sidelined the provincial government when it came to running Basrah since Maliki's arrival March 23.

WHERE IS RASHID MAJID AL-SARRAJI?

(S/NF) Before concluding, Dagher demanded to know why Rashid Majid al-Sarraji (OBJ NINO - ref C & D), the editor of SAS's "Al-Fatah" newspaper, was detained by the Coalition on January 16. Dagher argued that by detaining Rashid without charging him with a crime violated his human rights, was illegal, and "the Coalition was acting no better than Saddam's regime." Speaking to our translator on the way out, Dagher threatened to discontinue our engagement unless we provided some explanation

for Rashid's detention.

COMMENT

(S/NF) Unlike other SAS interlocutors we have met, Dagher is a polished politician. He chooses his words carefully and is capable of answering questions while omitting relevant details. His disdain for the Coalition was also clear, despite his requests for USG assistance in reconstructing Basrah. We do not doubt that he will disengage with us if we cannot provide some explanation for Rashid's detention.

HHOWARD